



## Personal Mastery Series – Are you ready to lead?

By Tony Graffeo, Ph.D

### What are the key attributes you bring to the leadership Challenge?



In STILE Point #9, the first part of answering the question “are you ready to lead” was to estimate the magnitude of the challenge. This involves calculating the degree of difficulty of the assignment; estimating your level of influence from those whose help you need; and taking inventory and getting commitment of the necessary resources.

Once the magnitude of the challenge has been determined, you can now look inward to determine whether you have sufficient attributes to meet the leadership challenge. By attributes I mean the unique qualities and characteristics that define you as a person. From my point of view, the fundamental attributes of high performance are motivation, natural talent, self-awareness and acquired skills. Based on my experience, most of you will probably focus more on “can I meet the leadership challenge?” by evaluating your past experience and measuring your current skill set. However, the more important question you should ask is “will I meet the challenge?” having much more to do with an understanding of your level of motivation; utilization of your natural talents; and the depth of your self-awareness.

In this STILE Point, we will explore the question of will I want to meet the challenge by focusing on the attributes of motivation and talent. In future STILE points in the Personal Mastery series, we will examine the role that self awareness plays in underpinning motivation and finally prioritizing the critical skills needed to lead the three phases of the performance Trilogy®; strategy, execution, and leadership development.

### Examine your motives

The first key attribute and in many ways the most important is motivation. As a young professional, I viewed every promotion opportunity as a way of getting ahead, making more money, and having more prestige. These extrinsic drivers were important to me having grown up in a family with



very limited resources. While a healthy dose of ambition can be an initial driver, in my experience is not sufficient to sustain the kind of motivation and extraordinary effort that is needed to ensure successful completion of difficult assignments. After the initial ego gratification and bump in salary wears off, you are left with the day-to-day pressures and difficulties of performing. Peter Drucker's advice is "given the choice between making more money or gaining more experience, always chose gaining more experience".

Later on in my career, I became less interested in my personal accomplishments and much more interested in growing high performance technical organizations that also satisfied the career aspirations of my fellow scientists and engineers. Building teams proved to be much more stimulating and rewarding for me and as it turns out increases the probability of success. My ambition now is to coach up-and-coming technical managers by passing on the hard lessons I've learned over the years in order to accelerate their leadership development. This is so rewarding that it doesn't even feel like work anymore.

The cliché "pursue what you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life" has an element of truth in it. Leading is really hard work. Start by asking the question "Why am I interested in this particular assignment besides the money and stature and does its success have meaning and purpose for me"? . The answer will help determine whether you have the passion and energy necessary to work at full capacity and persevere through the tough obstacles that you will inevitably encounter.

### Discover your true talents

There is a strong correlation between what you love to do and your specific talents (i.e. natural born skills). At an early age, all of us derived pleasure and satisfaction from the success and positive feedback we got from displaying our natural born skills. As a result we tended to spend more time and attention in nurturing those skills and applying them to our daily life. Some realize at an early age that they are more likely to be happier and probably more successful if they choose careers that require the use of their specific talents. Their choice may or may not have anything to do with how much money they can make. Others like myself, focused at first on the economic return that specific careers could offer and had to readjust when the money just wasn't enough to motivate us to achieve at our full potential.



I discovered early on that two of my more obvious talents were my curiosity and skill in mathematics. These talents along with my desire for getting ahead and making money drove me toward a career in science and engineering (chemical engineers at that time topped the annual professional earnings list). While I was pretty successful early in my career as a bench scientist, I found that it wasn't as fulfilling as I would have liked. While it satisfied my love for exploration and discovery, the progress of science is very slow and the day-to-day activity required very little interaction with others. Given my gregarious nature and lack of patience, I knew that I had made a career mistake. With additional introspection, and experience, I discovered that with my scientific base, I could take advantage of my other talents. My competitiveness and salesmanship talents allowed me to move out of the laboratory and into business development, which I loved. Writing a complex proposal for funding with my colleagues and winning competitive contracts was almost as much fun as the sandlot touch football games I enjoyed so much as a teenager.

I now have a greater appreciation and great deal of respect for individuals who persist in following their dreams regardless of the level of remuneration. In my book, they will achieve far greater rewards than a bigger car or larger house.

Discovering your true talent is not an exercise to be taken lightly. It took me years of analysis and practice to increase my self-awareness before I found out what my real *ichigai* was. *Ichigai* is an Okinawan expression for why I get out of bed every morning. Talent comes in a variety of different physical and mental forms if you look hard enough. It can be a photographic memory, attention to detail, an eloquent voice, imposing stature, an analytical mind, persistence: spend time in self discovery to find your unique set of talents and determine how they can be best used to achieve your goals.

In the next STILE Point in this series, we will discuss self-awareness and its importance in developing self-esteem and a healthy self-confidence.

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